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CARRIED BY STORM.

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CARRIED BY STORM.

CHAPTER I.

WHICH IS HIGHLY SENSATIONAL.

"Look at it well," says Miss Ventnor, "it is what you have never seen before—what you may never see again—a Haunted House!"

One slim, gloved hand, looking like a perfect hand in dark gray marble, points the dramatic speech. Miss Ventnor is given to dramatic and epigrammatic little speeches at all times, but as she is *not* given to talking nonsense at any time, I know there is 'method in the madness' of this assertion now. And yet—a haunted house! I laugh a little, as I lean out from the carriage to look.

"Do not laugh," says Miss Ventnor, austerely; "there is nothing to laugh at. A dark and direful tragedy was enacted within the walls of that gloomy red farm-house—let me see—four—yes, nearly five years ago. Do you see that third window to the right, in the attic story? Well, a man was murdered—stabbed to death in that room."

"Ugh! how horrid!" I say, with a shudder. If she had told me he had drowned himself, or poisoned himself, or charcoaled himself *a la Francais*, or even hanged himself, or gone out of time into eternity by any one of those other violent but unbloody gates, her tragedy would have lost its most grisly element. But the average female mind shrinks in repulsion from the thought of a severed jugular or a pool of blood.

"And ever since the house has been haunted, of course," says Miss Ventnor, folding one gray kid calmly over the other. "It is a good house and a fine farm, and since Sleaford's time—Sleaford was the victim—the rent has been merely nominal. All in vain. Sleaford 'walks,' and in the 'dead waste and middle of the night' the struggle is re-enacted, and panic-stricken, belated wagoners fly. It is all nonsense, of course," says Miss Ventnor, changing suddenly from a Siddons' voice to a practical every-day one. "Sleaford, poor wretch, lies over yonder in Potter's Field, and troubles nobody. But the fact remains that people will not live in the place, and the most audacious tramp and thief will give the peach trees and melon patches of Sleaford's a wide berth, be he never so hungry. And—I do not mind admitting that even *I* would go half a dozen miles roundabout rather than pass it alone after nightfall. So take a good look at it, my dear, a *bona fide* haunted house is a sight to be respected and remembered, if only for its rarity in this degenerate age. And this evening, after dinner, I will tell you all about it."

I do not need the injunction—I *am* taking a good look at Slea-

ford's! Even without Miss Ventnor's ghastly legend the place could hardly fail to impress one in a weird and dismal way. But just now the *mise en scene* is in keeping with the story. A gray, fast-drifting, autumnal sky, lying low, and threatening rain, a chill, complaining fitful wind, rising and falling over the rich rank marshes, a long stretch of flat farm land, sere and brown, corn-stalks rattling their melancholy dry bones, the orchard treess stripped and forlorn. In the midst the house, long, low, a dull-brick color; broken panes in the windows, broken fences around, no dog at the gate, no face at the casement, no smoke from the chimneys, no voice to welcome or warn away. Desolation has lain her lean brown hand upon it, and marked her own. Anything more forlorn, more "ramshackle," more forbidding, no fancy can picture. And from being a deserted house, no matter what the cause, from ghosts to bedbugs, to being a haunted house, there is but a step.

"There it stands," says Miss Ventnor, musingly, her elbow on her knee, her pretty chin in her hand,

> "Under some prodigious ban
> Of excommunication——"

and yet I can remember when Sleaford's was the rendezvous of all that was youngest, loudest, merriest, in a radius of twenty miles—the 'jolliest old roost going,' as poor Frank Livingston used to tell me. The Sleaford girls were the handsomest, reddest-cheeked, blackest-eyed, loudest laughing gipsies to be seen for a mile. There were two of them, as much alike as peas in a pod, as round and rosy as twin tomatoes! There were the

two Sleaford boys, tall, strapping fellows, with more of the wild gipsy strain even than their sisters, the best dancers, wrestlers, rowers, singers, fighters, everything but the best farmers—they never worked. There was Giles Sleaford himself, who went up to that attic room one moonlight night, a strong, stalwart man, and was carried down next morning—an awful spectacle. And last of all there was—Joanna."

CHAPTER II.

"WAIT! LOOK THERE!"

Miss Ventnor's voice takes a sudden change as it slowly—reluctantly, it seems—pronounces this name, a touch of strong repulsion it has not had even when telling the story of Sleaford's grisly death. She sits suddenly erect as she utters it, and gathers up the reins.

"Let us go," she says, with a shiver; "it is a horrible place, haunted by evil memories if by nothing more tangible. It is growing cold, too. Do not look at it any more—it is uncanny. You will dream of Sleaford's to-night."

"Wait!" I say; "look there!"

I speak in a whisper, and lay my hand on her arm. Miss Ventnor bends forward. Over the broken pickets of the fence the solitary figure of a man leans, his arms folded across the top, his eyes fixed steadfastly on the house. A moment ago he was not there; we have not seen him approach; the apparition could not have been more unexpected if he had risen from the ground.

"Ah!" Miss Ventnor says, a half-startled look coming into her eyes, "I did not know *he* was here. That is the one man

of all the men on earth who could throw light on part of the Sleaford mystery—if he chose."

"And he does not choose?"

"He does not choose—I doubt if he ever will choose. I wonder—I *wonder* what he has done with her!"

"With her? with whom? One of the black-eyed, tomato-cheeked Misses Sleaford?"

"Misses Sleaford?" contemptuously. "No, Joanna. That is her window he is looking at—the attic room next to the chamber of horrors. I wonder what he has done with her," says Miss Ventnor, speaking to herself; "it must have been worse than having a white elephant on his hands. That is George Blake."

"George Blake! H-m! a commonplace cognomen enough for the hero of a melodrama. Do I understand you to say this Mr. Blake eloped with Mlle. Joanna?"

"No; Joanna eloped with *him*. He was the victim. Never mind now. I am cold, and I want my dinner. I am going home. Get along, Frisky!"

Frisky pricks up his ears, tosses his brown mane, and gets along. The sound pierces through Mr. Blake's brown study; he turns sharply and sees Miss Ventnor. She inclines her head, he lifts his hat—a moment and we are out of sight. In that moment I have caught a glimpse of a sallow and rather handsome face, a slight and medium-sized figure, two dark eyes, and a brown mustache.

"A *very* commonplace young man to be the first lover in a

melodrama," I reiterate. "Is—ah—your Mr. Blake a gentleman, Olga?"

"*My* Mr. Blake!" repeats Miss Ventnor, laughing; "well, you wouldn't know much difference. He is a newspaper man, a journalist, a penny-a-liner, works on daily papers—is clever, they say, and has good manners. A thousand times too good to have his life spoiled by a woman."

"My dear, that is the only thing of interest about him, the leaven that lightens the whole man. There is always the element of the heroic in a man whose life has been spoiled by a woman—if there is anything in him it is sure to force it out. And men bear it so well, too! I dare say Mr. George Blake eats his three meals per diem with as Christian a relish, and writes twice as pungent paragraphs as before. Was Joanna pretty? Quaint little ugly name, by the by—Joanna."

Olga Ventnor does not reply. At last she lowers the reins and looks at me.

"Do you believe," she asks, "in people being possessed?"

"Good gracious!" I cry, aghast.

It is the second startling speech within the hour, and really this last is quite too horrid.

"Because," says Miss Ventnor, trenchantly, "if ever any human being was possessed of a demon Joanna was! Now do not ask any questions, for here we are, and thumb-screws would not extort another syllable from me until I have had my dinner."

CHAPTER III.

PERPLEXING THOUGHTS.

The threatening rain begins to fall with the falling darkness. It is beating sharply against the panes as we descend to the dining-room half an hour later. But plate-glass and crimson curtains shut out wind, and rain, and night; a fire burns in the shining grate, the gas-lights in their ground glass lily-cups flood the deep red carpet, the gilt picture-frames, the polished mahogany sideboard, the sparkling crystal, and rough old silver of the dinner service. And Miss Ventnor, in dark-blue silk, with a good deal of black lace about it, and a sweet-smelling crimson rose in her hair, is quite an ideal hostess. But all through soup and salmon, roast and *entrees*, jellies and pastry, iced pudding and peaches, and black coffee, I think of the Sleafords and the gloomy red farm-house, the awful upper chamber, the tomato-faced maidens, the gipsy sons, the mysterious Joanna, and the lonely figure of Mr. George Blake, leaning with folded arms on the broken rails, and gazing at the lattice of the young woman who had eloped with him. Does Mr. Blake prefer coming back here, and sentimentalizing over four greenish panes of glass to gazing on the charms of Mistress Joanna in the flesh?

After dinner, with slippers on the fender, the ruby shine of the fire on her trailing azure silk and fine laces, and red rose, and pretty fair hair, Olg atells me the story of the Sleafords.

Outside there is the accompaniment of fast-falling rains, dully sighing wind, wetness, blackness, night. I set it down here in different words, and much more than Miss Ventnor told me, much more than she knew herself that memorable night. Bit by bit the strange affair has come to light, and to the knowledge of those interested therein, among whom no one is, or has been, more vividly interested than myself. If I do not carry *you* away as *I* was carried away that evening, it is because pen, ink, and paper do not constitute a handsome young lady in silk attire, with sweet, clear voice, sweet shining eyes, and a story-telling talent that would have done honor to one of those improper creatures in the Decameron, who told tales by moonlight in the garden of Boccaccio to the listening Florentines. This, in *my* way, and with additions, is the story Olga Ventnor told me that wet October night—the tragic story of the Sleafords.

CHAPTER IV.

OLGA VENTNOR.

The village of Brightbrook! You do not know it, perhaps, and yet it is not unknown to fame or fashion in the heated months—but it was both, twenty odd years ago, when Olga Ventnor first set her blue, bright eyes upon it. A slim lassie, an only child, an heiress, a dainty, upright, fair-haired fairy, all Swiss muslin, Valenciennes lace, Hamburg embroideries, many tucks, and much ruffling. Straight as a dart, white as a lily—a delicate little aristocrat, from the crown of her golden head to the sole of her sandaled foot; idolized by papa, adored by mamma, paid court to by friends, relatives, playmates, teachers, servants, village folk—a small princess, by royal right of beauty, birth, wealth. That is a correct picture of Miss Olga Ventnor, *ætat* ten.

And yet, in spite of all, of spoiling and flattery enough to ruin an army of innocents, she was a charming child, simple and natural, with a laugh all wild and free, pretty childish ways, full of flawless health and rosy life. It was for her sake—the apple of his eye, and the pride of his life—that Colonel Ventnor resigned Swiss mountains, Lake Como sunsets, ascents of Vesuvius, Texan plains on fleet mustangs, yachting adown the

picturesque coast of Maine, camping out on the Adirondacks, mountain trout baked in cream, and all the other delights of his existence, and built this pretty villa in Brightbrook, and came down here in the month of roses, with eight "in help," and a pretty, pallid, invalid wife—forswore all wild, wandering ways forever, so that little Olga might run wild among the clover and buttercups, and from much fresh air, and sweet milk, and strawberries picked with her own taper fingers, grow up to blooming health and maidenhood.

Colonel Ventnor—he had served with distinction all through the "unpleasantness"—was a very rich man, and the descendant of a family of very rich men. Such a thing as a poor Ventnor perhaps had never been heard of. They were wealthy always, high-bred always, holding enviable positions under government always, never defiling their patrician fingers with trade or commerce of any kind, and, in a general way, considering their status and superiority to all earthly pursuits, with quite as many brains as was good for them. Of these mighty men, Colonel Livingston Ventnor was the last, and little Olga, in her Swiss tucks and Leghorn sun-hat, the very last daughter of the house, born, if ever embryo belle and heiress was yet, with a golden spoon in her mouth.

"We must marry her to Frank Livingston in about ten years from now," said the family conclave, "and so keep everything in the family. Pity she is not a boy—too bad to sink the Ventnor for Livingston—but Frank can add the old name by and by when he marries Olga."

Perhaps this imperial ukase was not read in form to the bride-elect, but it met the approval of papa and mamma, and certainly was announced to the future bridegroom, a slim, very pretty young fellow of eighteen or so, with a passion for base-ball, and another for pencil drawing. He was really a bright lad, and at this age quite a wonder to see in the way of tallness, and slimness, and straightness. And he only grinned when his fond mamma folded him with effusion in her arms, and announced, with joyful tears, that he—he—her Francis—her darling boy, and *not* Anselm Van Dyack, nor Philip Vandewelode, had been chosen for the distinguished position of prince consort to the heiress of many Ventnors.

"And you need never lower your family, nor slave yourself to death painting pictures now, my dearest, dearest boy! Olga Ventnor's fortune must be simply immense—IMMENSE!"

"All right, mother," says Frank, still grinning; "and when is it to be—this week or next? Or am I to wait until she grows up? *I* am on hand always; when you want me, please to ring the bell."

"Frank, this is no theme for jesting. They will not permit it for at least ten years. Say her education is finished at eighteen, then two years of travel, then the wedding. Meantime, whenever you see little Olga be just as nice as possible—impressions made at her age often last through life."

Frank throws back his head, and laughs immoderately.

"Did I ever dream in my wildest dime novel days it would come to this? Did I ever think that, like Dick Swiveller, I

would have a young woman growing up for me! Don't wear that face, mother, or you will be the death of me. I'll run down to Brightbrook next week, if you like, and do a little stroke of courting, and hunt butterflies with the little dear until the end of July."

So Frank runs down, and is made welcome at the pretty white villa, all embowered in pink vases and scented honeysuckle like a cottage in a picture, and by none more gladly than little Olga. All that mere money can buy is hers, but even money has its limits as to power, and it cannot buy her a playmate and constant companion of her own age. The child is a little lonely, surrounded by love and splendor. Brother or sister she has never had, mamma is always ailing and lying on the sofa, papa is away a great deal, Jeannette, the *bonne*, is lazy and stupid, and says it is too hot to play, and in all Brightbrook there is no one this dainty little curled darling may stoop to romp with. Yes, by the by, there is one, just one, of whom more anon, but she is not always available. So the little princess, forgetting the repose which makes the caste of Vere de Vere, utters a scream of joy at sight of Cousin Frank, and flings herself absolutely plump into his arms.

"Oh! I *am* so glad!" she cries out. "Oh! Frank, how nice of you to come. I've been wanting you every day of my life since we came down here—oh, ever and ever so! Mamma, you *know* I've been wanting Cousin Frank."

Mamma smiles. Frank lifts the little white-robed, golden-haired, rose-cheeked vision up higher than his head, kisses her,

and with her perched on his shoulder, and shrieking with delight, starts off for the first game of romps, It is all as it should be. Mrs. Colonel Ventnor settles her muslins and laces, lies back in her blue satin chair and resumes her book very well pleased.

CHAPTER V.

MYSTERIOUS ABSENCES.

Frank's one week lasts well on into September. Brightbrook abounds in cool hill-side streams and tarns, from which it takes its name, and these sparkling waters abound in turn with fine trout. Fishing is dreamy, lazy, *insouciant* sort of work, suited to sleepy, artistic fancies, and the young fellow spends a good deal of his time armed with rod and line and lunch-basket, and waited upon dutifully by his devoted little hand-maiden, Princess Olga. All the world adores her, she in turn adores Frank. He is the handsomest, the cleverest, the dearest cousin in all the world. He paints her picture, he bears her aloft in triumph on his shoulder, he sings her German drinking songs, he teaches her to bait her hook and catch fish, he takes her for long rambles in the woods, he instructs her in the art of waltzing, he tells her the most wonderful goblin tales ever human brains invented.

And all this without a jot of reference to his mother's romance of the future. *That* he laughs at—simply because she is the prettiest little darling in the world, and he is fond of children. Marry her in ten years—ten years forsooth! Why not say half

a century at once, and have done with it? He is seventeen—ten years looks a long perspective, a little forever, to eyes seventeen years old.

October comes. With the first bleak blast and whistling drift of maple leaves these birds of summer forsake their fragile nest, and flutter back to the stately family home of the Ventnors on Madison avenue. The pretty white villa, with its roses, and verandas, and conservatories, and sun-dial, is shut up, and only an old man and his daughter left to care for it until the next June honeysuckles blow.

Little Olga goes back to her books and her piano, under an all-accomplished governess; Frank goes in for painting, and takes a trip to the everglades of Florida. Early next summer the Ventnor family return, making a mighty stir throughout Brightbrook, and in due course down comes Mr. Frank.

A year has made its mark on this young man. His fine tenor voice is changing to an ugly bass, a callow down is forming on his upper lip, and is loved and caressed as a youthful mother may her first-born babe. He is absent a great deal from the cottage, and he very seldom takes Olga with him anywhere now.

Nobody knows where he spends his time. Olga is the only one who inquires; Olga, piqued and pouting, yet too proud even at eleven to let him see how much she cares.

"Where have you been *now?*" she will ask.

"Oh, up the village."

It is his invariable answer, and it being a dull little village,

and Mr. Francis of a lively turn, and fond of life, even rough and rollicking life, it is a little puzzling. Olga does not like it at all, he is not nearly so nice as on the preceding year, he leaves her to Jeannette and mamma, and amuses himself very well without her. The absenses grow more frequent and prolonged. He stays away whole days, and his latch-key opens the hall-door gently far into the dim watches of the night. Lying awake, looking at the summer moonlight stealing whitely in, the child will hear that cautious click, that light footstep passing the door, and presently the little Swiss clock on the mantel will chime out, silvery and sharp, two or three. Three in the morning, and up at the village! It *is* odd. But presently the mystery is solved for Olga in quite a sudden and awful way.

CHAPTER VI.

I AM NOT A TELL-TALE.

"Cousin Frank!"

There is no reply. Stretched on the sun-steeped grass, his straw hat pulled over his face, his long length casting a prodigious shadow in the afternoon sunshine, Cousin Frank is leagues away in the lovely land of dreams.

"Frank! Cousin Frank! Frank Livingston! Oh, dear!" sighs Olga, impatiently. "No wonder he is asleep. It struck three this morning before—Frank! Oh, how stupid you are! Do, *do* wake up!"

Thus adjured, and further urged by the pointed toe of a most Cinderella-like shoe of blue kid, Frank consents to slowly and lazily open his handsome blue eyes.

"Oh!" she says, with a pout, "at last! You are worse than the Seven Sleepers. Here you have been fast asleep for the past two hours, and all that tiresome time I have been waiting here. I think it is horrid of you, Cousin Frank Livingston, to act so!"

"To act so? To act how, fairest of fairy cousins? What has your Frank, the most abject of thy slaves, Lady Olga, been doing now, to evoke your frown? There is no harm in taking

a snooze on the grass, is there?" says Frank, with a prolonged yawn.

Miss Olga stands beside him, slim, straight, white, blonde, pouting, and very, very pretty.

"There is harm in never coming home until half-past three in the morning every night. If you didn't do that you wouldn t sleep on the grass all the next afternoon. What would mamma say?"

He rises suddenly on his elbow and looks at her. Pretty well this, for a demoiselle of eleven! She stands rolling the gravel with one blue boot-tip, her wide-brimmed leghorn shading her face, the long, almost flaxen ringlets falling to her slender waist, her delicate lips pouting, the light figure upright as a dart.

"Princess Olga," Frank says, after a pause and a stare, "what an uncommonly pretty little thing you are getting to be! I must make a sketch of you just as you stand; that sunshine on your yellow curls and white dress is capital! Do not stir, please, my sketch-book is here; I will dash you off in all your lonelidess in the twinkling of a bed-post!"

Frank's sketch-book, and Frank himself are never far apart. He takes it up now, as it lies at his elbow, selects a fair and unspotted page, points a broad black pencil, and begins.

"Just as you are—do not move. Just as I am, and waiting not, to rid myself of one—some sort of blot,'—how is it the hymn goes? And so you heard me come in last night? Now who would think such pretty little pink ears could be so sharp!"

"Last night!" pouts Olga; "this morning you mean. Half-past three. I heard the clock strike."

"Don't believe the clock—it is a foul slanderer. Those little jeweled jimcracks that play tunes before they strike always tell lies. Did you tell mamma about it this morning, Olly?"

She flings back her head, and her blue eyes—very like Frank's own—kindle.

"Tell mamma! I am not a tell-tale, Cousin Frank."

The young fellow, sketching busily, draws a breath of relief.

CHAPTER VII.

A KEEPSAKE.

"Most gracious princess, you are a little trump. I ask pardon. Turn your head just a hair-breadth this way. Ah! thanks—that will do. Well, now, Olga, I *was* out rather late; but I met some—some fellows, and we played a game or two, and so——"

"Were you up the village?"

"Yes, up the village. You see Brightbrook is such a deadly-lively sort of place at the best, and a fellow must amuse himself a little in some way. And that reminds me—I have an engagement at five. What's the time, Olly? just look at my watch, will you?"

She obeys after a moment—a moment in which wistful longing and precocious pride struggle for mastery. Then she stoops and looks.

"A quarter of five. But you said——"

A pause.

"Well, I said?——"

"You said—you promised Leo Abbott yesterday that you

would drive me over there this afternoon, and we would have croquet and tea."

"Oh, did I?" carelessly. "Well, you must let me off, Olly, and make my excuses to little Leo. Upon my honor, I cannot manage it—awfully sorry all the same. But it need not keep you, you know; your papa will drive you, or Peters will."

Peters is head coachman, the safest of charioteers. Papa is always willing to drive his darling anywhere. But Olga Ventnor turns hastily away, and the childish eyes that look at the setting sun are full of tears she is too proud to let fall.

"There!" Frank says, after five minutes more devoted to the sketch; "there you are, as large as life, but not half so handsome. Here it is for a keepsake, Olga. When you are a tall, fascinating young lady—a brilliant belle, and all that—it will help to remind you of how you looked when a chickabiddy of eleven."

He tears out the leaf, scrawls under it, "Princess Olga, with the love of the most loyal of her lieges," and hands it to her. She takes it, her lips a little compressed, pique, pain in her eyes, plainly enough in spite of her pride, if he cares to look. But Frank has a happy knack of never looking, nor wishing to look, below the surface of things, and he has something to think of besides his little cousin's whims just at present.

"I am off," he says, jumping up. "And—look here, Olly—go to sleep like a good little thing when you go to bed, and don't lie awake o' nights in this wicked way counting the clock. It will bring gray hairs and wrinkles before you reach your

twelfth birthday. You will wake up some morning and find, like Marie Antoinette, all these long curls turned from gold to silver in a single night."

He pulls out one of the long tresses, fine as floss silk, to an absurd length, as he speaks.

"And besides, I am going to reform, to turn over a new leaf —numbers of new leaves—to become a good boy, and go to bed at ten. So say nothing to nobody, Olly, and above all—above everything—shut those blue peepers the moment your head is on the pillow, and never open them, nor the dear little pink ears, until six the next morning."

He gives the pink ear an affectionate and half-anxious tweak, smiles at the grave face of the child, flings his hat on, and departs.

The little girl stands watching him until he is out of sight, then, with a deep sigh that would have infinitely amused Master Frank could he have heard, turns for consolation to the drawing. Is she really so pretty as this? How clever Cousin Frank must be to sketch so—dash off things, as he calls it—all in a moment. She has it yet—yellow, faded, stored away among the souvenirs treasured most.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOST IN THE WOODS.

"Madame votre mere says will mademoiselle not come for one leetle walk before her supper?" says the high Norman sing-any-song voice of Jeannette, appearing from the house; "it will give ma'amselle an appetite for her tartine and strawberries."

"Very well, Jeannette. Yes, I will go. Here, take this up to my room. I will go on this way. You can follow me."

So, with a slow and lingering step, the little heiress of many Ventnors sets off. She is a somewhat precocious little girl, old-fashioned, as it is phrased, a trifle prim in speech and manner, except now and then when the wild child nature bursts its trammels, and she runs, and sings, and romps as wildly as the squirrels she chases. Just at this moment she is under a cloud. Cousin Frank has wounded and disappointed her. He will not tell her where he goes or what he does all these long hours of absence.

"Up the village" is vague and unsatisfactory to a degree; he has broken his promise about taking her to Abbott Wood, and she likes to play croquet with Geoff and Leo Abbott. Frank's

promises, she is beginning to discover, are very pie-crusty indeed ; he makes them with lavish prodigality, and breaks them without a shadow of scruple.

All these things are preying on Miss Ventnor's eleven-year-old mind for the first few minutes, and make her step lagging and her manner listless. Then a brilliant butterfly swings past her, and she starts in pursuit—then a squirrel darts out of a woodland path and challenges her to a race. Then a tempting cluster of flame-colored marsh flowers catches her eye, and she makes a detour to get them ; then she finds herself in a thicket of raspberry bushes, and begins to pluck and eat. Overhead there is a hot, hot sun, sinking in a blazing western sky like a lake of molten gold.

In these woody dells there are coolness and shadow, sweet forest smells, the chirp of birds, the myriad sounds of sylvan silence. A breeze is rising, too. She goes on and on, eating, singing, chasing birds and butterflies, rabbits and field mice, all live things that cross her path.

All at once she pauses. Where is Jeannette? She has been rambling more than an hour, she is far from home, the sun has set, she is tired, the place is strange, she has never been here before. Her dress is soiled, her boots are muddy ; woods, trees, marshes are around her—no houses, no people. Oh, where is she—where is her *bonne*?

"Jeannette ! Jeannette !"

She stops and cries aloud :

"Jeannette ! where are you ?"

Her shrill, childish voice echoes down the dim woodland aisles. Only that, and the gathering stillness of the lonesome evening in the woods.

"Jeannette! Jeannette! Jeannette!"

In wild affright the young voice peals forth its piteous cry. But only the fitful sighing of the twilight wind, only the mournful rustle of the leaves, only the faint call of the little mother birds in their nests, answer her. Then she knows the truth—she is lost!

Lost in the woods, far from any habitation, and night close at hand. Jeannette has lingered behind to gossip; she, Olga, has gone heedlessly on; now it is coming night; she is alone, and lost in the black, whispering, awful, lonely woods!

She stands still and looks around her. Overhead there is a gray and pearl-tinted sky, very bright still in the west, but with a star or two gleaming over the tree-tops. In the forest it is already pitch-dark. In the open, where she now stands, it will be light for half an hour yet. To the right spreads the pine woods, whispering, whispering mysteriously in the solemn darkening hush; to the left is a waste of dry and dreary marsh land, intermediate and blankly gray in the very gloaming. No house, no living thing to be seen far or near.

CHAPTER IX.

A WILD GIRL OF THE WOODS.

What shall she do? The child is not a coward—she has been so sheltered, so loved, so encompassed by care all her short life, that fear is a sensation almost unknown. If it were noonday she would not fear now, she would wander on and on, calling for Jeannette until some one came to her aid, some one who would be sure to take care of her and bring her home. But the gathering darkness is about her, the tall black trees stand up like threatening giants, the deep recesses of the wood are as so many gaping dragon's jaws, ready to swallow her up. Perhaps there are ghosts in that grim forest—Jeannette has a wholesome horror of *revenants*, and her little mistress shares it. Oh! what shall she do? Where is papa? where is Frank, mamma, Jeannette, any one, any one she knows, to come to the rescue? She stands there in that breathless, awesome solitude, a panic-stricken, lonely little figure, in her soiled dress, and muddy, blue kid boots.

"Jeannette! JEANNETTE! JEANNETTE!"

The terrified voice pierces wildly the stillness, its desolate echo comes back to her, and frightens her more and more. Oh! *what* shall she do? Must she stay here in this awful, awful

place until morning? What will become of her? Are there bears, or lions, or robbers in that spectral forest? She has on a necklace of gold beads—will they kill her for that?

"Jeannette! Jeannette!" she cries, in sobbing despair, but no Jeannette answers. She is indeed lost, hopelessly lost, and the dark, dreadful night is already here.

All this time she has been standing still, now a sudden panic seizes her. Fiery eyes glare at her out of the vast depths of the wood, strange weird moans, and voices in pain, come to her from its gloomy vastness. She turns wild with fright, and flies, flies for life from the haunted spot.

She runs headlong—how long or how far she never knows. Panting, gasping, slipping, falling, flying on! She does not cry out, she cannot, she is all spent and breathless. Something terrific is behind her, in hot pursuit, ghost, goblin, fiery dragon, who knew what, stretching forth skeleton hands to catch her—a phantom of horror and despair! And still the silvery twilight deepens, the stars shine out, and still she rushes on, a wildly flying, small white figure in the lovely summer dusk.

At last—overtasked nature can bear no more, she falls headlong on the soft, turfy ground, her eyes closed, her hands clenched, and lies panting and still. Is she dying, she wonders; she feels dizzy and sick—is she going to die far from papa and mamma, and Frank, alone in this lonesome place? How sorry they will all be to-morrow, when they come upon her lying like this, all cold and dead. She thinks of the Babes in the Wood, and wonders if the robins will cover *her* with leaves.

"Hullo!"

It is no voice of ghost or goblin. It is unmistakably a human salute, and very close by. She lifts herself silently, too utterly exhausted to reply, and sees standing beside her, in the dusk of the warm night, the figure of—a girl! *Is* it a girl? She puts back the tangled golden locks, and gazes up in a dazed, bewildered way, at this apparition.

"Hullo!" says the voice, again. It is not a pleasant voice; the face that looks down at her is not a pleasant face. It *is* a girl, of twelve or so, in a scant skirt, a boy's blouse belted with a strap of leather, a shaggy head of unkempt reddish hair, a thin, eager, old-young face, long bare legs, and bare feet.

"Hullo!"

For the third time she hails the prostrate Olga with this salute, in a high-pitched, harsh tone, and for the third time receiving no reply, varies it:

"I say, you! Ye ain't deef, are ye? Can't ye speak? Who are you? What are you doin' here, this time o' night?"

Still no reply. The rasping voice, the scowling look, the wild air of the unexpected figure, have stricken Olga mute with a new terror. No one has ever looked at her, or spoken to her like this, in all her life before.

"Deef are ye, or sulky—which? Git up—git up, I say, or I'll make ye! Say you! who are you? What are ye about here, lying on the ground? Why—lor! ef it ain't the Ventnor gal!"

CHAPTER X.

"PLEASE DON'T BITE ME!"

She has taken a stride toward Olga, who springs to her feet instantly. They stand confronting one another in the dim light, the little white heiress shaking with fatigue and fear, the fierce-looking, wild creature glancing at her with eyes like a cat.

"Say! If ye don't speak I'll scratch ye, I'll bite ye—I'll pull your ugly long hair out by the roots! Ain't you the Ventnor gal? Come now—say!"

She makes a threatening step near. The poor little princess puts up two imploring hands.

"Oh! please, please don't bite me! I don't mean any harm. I am only lost, and fell down here!" A great sob. "I am Olga Ventnor, and I want to go home—oh! I want to go home!"

She breaks down in a great passion of sobs. The impish-looking child before her bursts into a discordant, jeering laugh.

"She wants to go home! Oh, she wants to go home! Oh! please somebody come and take this young lady home! Look at her! Ain't she putty with her old white dress, and muddy shoes, and shiny beads. Say, you! give me them beads this very minute, or I'll snatch 'em off your neck."

With rapid, trembling fingers, the child unfastens the necklace, and holds it out to her tormentor.

"What business have you, you stuck-up little peacock!" continues the imp, wrenching, savagely, the costly trinket asunder, "with hair down to your waist, yellow hair too, the color of your beads, and all in nasty ringlets! Oh, lordy! we think ourselves handsome, don't we! And embroidery and lace on our frocks, and pink, and blue, and white-buttoned boots, with ribbon bows! *I've* seen you. And a French servant gal to wait on us, in a white cap and apron! And a kerridge to ride in! And white feathers in our hats, and kid gloves, and silk stockens! We're a great lady, *we* are, till we get lost in the woods, and then we can't do nothin' but sit down and blubber like a great calf! Why, you little devil!" she takes a step nearer, and her tone and look grow ferocious, "do you know that I hate you, that I would like to tramp on you, that I spit at you!" which she does, "that I would like to pull out every one of them long curls by the roots! And I'll do it, too, before I let you go!"

The child is deadly white, deadly still with fear. She does not speak or move, cry out or turn to run—some terrible fascination holds her there breathless and spell-bound.

"What business have you," cries the creature, with ever-increasing ferocity, "with curls, and silk dresses, and gold beads, and servants, and kerridges, while your betters are tramping about barefooted, and beat, and abused, and starved? You ain't so good, for you're a coward, and a cry-baby, and a little

fool! And I'm goin' to hev them curls! And if you screech I'll kill you! I will! I hate you—I've hated you ever since I sor you first!"

She darts a step nearer. Olga recoils a step backward. Still she makes no outcry, no attempt to run. That fascination of intense terror holds her fast.

"I know you, and I know all about you," goes on the goblin. "I know your cousin, Frank Livingston; he comes to our house—he gives presents to Lora and Liz Sleaford. He's sweet on Lora, he is. *She* wears long curls, Lor bless you, too. Like tar ropes they are, over *her* shoulders. I'm Sleaford's Joanna; if I don't kill you, you'll know me next time, won't you? And I hate you because you're a young lady, with kerridges, and servants, and nothin' to do, and long yellow ringlets down your stuck-up back."

The ringlets seem to be the one unforgivable sin; she glares at them vengefully as she speaks.

"I'm going to pull them out. I never thought I'd hev the chance. There ain't nobody here to help or come if you yell. I don't care if they beat me to death for it, or hang me—I'll pull 'em out!"

She springs upon her victim with the leap of a wild-cat, and buries her claw-like fingers in the pale gold of the clustering hair. There is no mistaking her meaning—she fully intends it; her fierce eyes blaze with a baleful fire. And now, indeed, Olga finds her voice, and it rings out shrill, pealing, agonized.

"Papa! papa! Oh, papa!"

"Hi!" answers a sharp voice. Then a sharper whistle cuts the air. "Hi! Who's that? Call again!"

"Papa! papa! papa!'

There is a crashing among the trees, and not a second too soon. With a violent push, and—*an oath*—this diabolical Little Barefoot flings her victim from her, and leaps away into the darkness with the fleetness of a fawn.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LITTLE HEIRESS.

It is not papa who comes rushing to the rescue, but it is a man who stoops and picks her up—a young man with a gipsy face, a gun over his shoulder, and two or three yelping dogs at his heels.

"What the dickens is the row?" he asks. "Hold up, little 'un. Good G——! she's dead!"

It looks like it. She lies across his arm, a limp and inert little form, all white drapery, blonde curls, and pale, still face. The moon is rising now, the big white shield of the July night, and he takes off the crushed Leghorn flat the better to behold his prize.

"By thunder!" he exclaims, aloud, "it's the little Ventnor. The little great lady, the little heiress. Now, then, here's a go, and no mistake."

He stands at a loss, utterly surprised. She has been as a small Sultana in the eyes of all Brightbrook, every one knows her, and to find her like this, dead to all seeming, murdered, it may be, appalls him.

"She wasn't dead a minute ago; she was screeching for her papa like a good 'un. Perhaps she ain't dead yet. Maybe she's fainted, or that, frightened at something. Don't seem to be anybody here to frighten her, nuther. Wonder what's gone with the French ma'amselle? Well, I'll tote her to the house anyhow; if she's alive at all the gals 'll fetch her round."

He swings her as he might a kitten over his shoulder. He is a long-limbed, brown-skinned young fellow of twenty, whistles to his dogs, and starts over the star-lit fields at a swinging pace. All the way he whistles, all the way his keen black eyes keep a bright lookout for any one who may be in hiding. No one seems to be, for he reaches his destination, a solitary red farm-house standing among some arid-looking meadows. A field of corn at one side looks, in the shine of the moon, like a goblin play-ground, but the house itself seems cheery enough. Many lights twinkle along its low front, and the lively strains of a fiddle greet him as he opens the door.

The interior is a remarkable one enough. The room is long and low, the ceiling quite black with smoke, as are also the walls, the broad floor a trifle blacker, if possible, than either, the furniture, some yellow wooden chairs, two deal-tables, a wooden sofa, and a cupboard, well-stocked with coarse blue delf, It is, in fact, the farm-house kitchen, and in the wide fire-place, despite the warmth of the night, a fire is burning. Over it hangs a large pot, in which the family supper is simmering and sending forth savory odors.

The occupants of the room are four. On one of the tables

is perched a youth of eighteen, black-eyed, black-haired, swarthy-skinned, playing the Virginia reel with vigor and skill.

Two girls, young women, as far as size and development make women, though evidently not more than sixteen, are dancing with might and main, their hands on their sides, their heads well up, their cheeks flushed crimson, their black eyes alight, their black hair unbound—two wild young Bacchanti.

The one spectator of the reel sits crouched in the chimney-corner, her knees drawn up, her elbows on them, her chin in her palms, a singularly witch-like attitude, barefooted, shock-headed, with gleaming, derisive, dark eyes.

The door is flung wide, and enters the young man of the woods, with his burden, his gun, and his dogs. The reel comes to a sudden stop, and six big black eyes stare in wild wonder at this unexpected sight.

"Why—what is it?" one of the girls cries; "a dead child, Dan? What for the Lord's sake have you got there?"

"Ah! What?" says Dan. "Here, take her, and see if she's living or dead. I can tell you who she is fast enough—or who she was, rather, for she looks as dead as a door nail now, blessed if she don't. Here! fetch her to if you can, you, Lora; it will be worth while, let me tell you."

He lays the limp child in the arms of one of the girls. The firelight falls full upon the waxen face as they all crowd around. Only the crouching figure in the ingle nook stirs not. There is a simultaneous outcry of recognition and dismay.

"It's little Missy Ventnor!"

"It's the kernal's little gal!"

"It's Frank Livingston's cousin!"

"It's the little heiress!"

Then there is a pause, an open-mouthed, round-eyed pause, and gasp of astonishment. It requires a moment to take this in.

"And while you're staring there like stuck pigs," says the sarcastic voice of Brother Dan, "the young 'un stands a good chance of becoming a stiff 'un in reality, if she ain't now. Can't you sprinkle her with water, you fools, or unhook her clothes, or do whatever ought to be done? You, Lora, tote her into the next room, and bring her round, and you, Liz, dish up that hash, for I'm as hungry as a hunter."

Issuing these commands, he draws up a chair to the fire as though it were December, and proceeds to load a little black pipe to the muzzle. Thus engaged, his eyes fall on the huddled-up figure opposite.

"Oh!" he growls, "*you're* there, Miss Fiery Head, layin' in the chimney-corner, as usual. Git up and set the table. D'ye hear!"

She does not seem to; she blinks up at him like a toad, and does not stir. With an oath he seizes a billet of wood, and hurls it at her, but she ducks with a mocking laugh, and it goes over her head. As he stoops for another, she springs to her feet, and sets to work to do his bidding.

Meanwhile, in the next room, the two sisters are doing their unskilled best to bring Miss Ventnor "round." It is the par-

lor of the establishment, has a carpet on the floor, cane-seated chairs arranged primly around, a rocker to match, sundry gay and gaudy chromos on the walls, china dogs and cats on the mantel, green boughs in the fire-place, and a crimson lounge under the windows. On this lounge they lay her, they sprinkle her plentifully with water, force a little whisky into her mouth, slap her palms, undo her dress, and after some ten minutes of this manipulation there is a long-drawn sigh and shiver, the eyelids flutter, open, shut, open again, and two blue eyes look up into the gipsy faces bending above her.

"There!" says one of the sisters, with a long breath of satisfaction, "you're all right now, ain't you? Gracious! how white and limpsy you was, to be sure. First time I ever saw anybody in a faint before in my life. Drink a little drop of this—it's whisky and water."

But Olga pushes away the nauseous beverage with disgust.

CHAPTER XII.

SLEAFORD'S.

"I don't like it," she says, faintly; "the smell makes me sick. Please take it away." She pushes back her tangled hair, and looks vaguely about her. "Where am I?" she asks, beginning to tremble. "What place is this?"

"Oh, you're all right; don't be scared, deary," says the sister called Lora; "this is Sleaford's. I'm Lora Sleaford; this is my sister, Liz. Bless us, what a pretty little thing you are—as fair as a lily, I do declare! I wish *I* was; but I'm as black as a crow. We all are, father and all, even our Joanna, in spite of her horrid red hair. Don't be frightened, little missy; we know who you are, and you are all safe. And we know your cousin, Frank Livingston; he is a right nice fellow—comes here most every night. Likely's not he'll be here in a little while now, and then he can take you home. Liz! there's the boys calling for their supper, and I hear father. You'd better go and get it for them."

"Joanna's there," says Liz, not stirring; "let *her*."

"When you know very well she won't if she takes the notion," retorts Lora, angrily; "there! there's father calling you. Now you *must* go."

It seems she must, for she does. Lora turns back again to her charge. There is not much difference in these two sisters, and naturally, for they are twins, but Lora is rather the better looking, and decidedly the better natured of the pair.

"How did you come to be with our Dan, anyhow?" she asks, curiously. "Where did he find you? and what on earth made you faint away?"

The question arouses memory. Olga shuts her eyes with a shudder, and turns so white that Lora thinks she is going to faint again.

"Oh! that dreadful girl! that dreadful girl!" she says, with a shuddertng gasp.

"What dreadful girl? What do you mean? Did you get lost, and did somebody scare you in the woods? What was she like?" demands Lora, sharply.

But Olga cannot tell. She trembles, and shivers, and covers her eyes with her hands, as if to shut out some dreadful vision.

"She said she would pull my hair out, and then—and then I got dizzy, and it got dark, and—and that is all," she replies, incoherently.

"Now I wonder if it wasn't our Joanna?" Miss Sleaford says, musingly. "It would be just like her—little imp! If I thought it was—but no, Joanna was in the house ever so long before they came. Well, don't you cry, little deary. Frank Livingston will be here pretty soon, and he'll take you home. Now I'll go and get you something to eat. You're hungry, ain't you, and would like some tea?"

"Oh, I only want papa—nothing but papa!" sobs the child, quivering with nervous excitement. "Oh, papa, papa, papa!"

"Well, there—don't make a fuss; your papa will come directly, I tell you. And you are all safe here, and needn't be afraid. Now I'll go and get you something—toast and tea, if there is any tea. So stop crying, or you'll make yourself sick."

Miss Sleaford departs. In the kitchen the two young men, and their father, Giles Sleaford, are seated at one ot the deal tables, partaking of steaming hash with the appetites of hunters and constitutionally hungry men. The father is like the sons, a powerful, black-bearded, sullen-looking man. Evidently he has heard the story, for he looks up, with a glower, as his daughter enters.

"Well?" he says, in a growling sort of voice; "how is she?"

"Oh, all right," Lora responds. "Crying for her papa, of course. She won't take any of that stuff," pointing to the greasy dish of hash with some disdain; "I must make her some toast, if there is any raised bread."

"There ain't any raised bread," says Liz.

"Make her tea," suggests Dan; "that's the stuff they drink. Store tea and some short-cake."

"There ain't no tea," says Liz again.

"Get some, then," growls the master of the house; "she's worth taking care on. Send to Brick's and get some."

"Joanna!" calls Liz, sharply; "d'ye hear? Go!"

She turns to the chimney-corner, where, crouched again, like a small salamander, in her former attitude, is Joanna, basking like a lizard in the heat.

"Won't!" returns Joanna, briefly; "go yourself."

"What!" cries Giles Sleaford, turning in sudden ferocity from the table—"what!"

"Says she won't," says Liz, maliciously—"says go myself."

The man rises and takes down a horsewhip from a shelf near, without a word. The dark, glittering eyes of the girl follow him, but she does not stir.

"Won't, won't she?" says Mr. Sleaford. "We'll see if she won't. You little —— ——!"—two oaths and a hissing blow. "You won't go, won't you, you little foxy —— ——!"

With each imprecation, a cut of the whip falls across the shoulders of the crouching child. Two or three she bears in silence, then with a fierce scream of pain and passion, she leaps to her feet, darts across the room, and spits at him like a mad cat.

"No, I won't, I won't, I won't—not if you cut me in pieces with your whip! I won't go for tea for her! I won't go for nothin' for her! I won't go for you—not if you whip me to death! I won't go! I won't, I won't, I won't!"

The man pauses; used as he is to her paroxysms of fury she looks so like a mad thing, in her rage at this moment, that he actually holds his brutal hand.

"Oh! come, dad, you let her alone," remonstrates his younger son; "don't cut her up like that."

But recovering from his momentary check, Giles Sleaford lays hold of her to renew the attack. As he does so Joanna stoops and buries her sharp white teeth in his hand. And at that same instant a small white figure, with blanched face and dilated eyes, glides forward and stands before him.

"Don't! Oh, don't!" Olga Ventnor says. "Oh! pray, pray don't beat her like that!"

She holds up her clasped hands to Giles Sleaford, who, partly from the pain of the bite, partly from surprise, recoils and lets go his hold. Instantly Joanna darts away, opens the door, and disappears.

"That's the last of *her* till dinner-time to-morrow," says the younger Sleaford, with a laugh. "She'll roost with the blue-birds to-night. Dad mayn't think so, but he'll drive that little devil to run a knife into him yet.

There is many a true word spoken in jest, says the adage. In the dark and tragical after days that somber speech comes back to young Judson Sleaford like a prediction.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I MUST GO HOME."

So it befalls, that in spite of threats and horsewhip, Joanna has her own way, and does not go for the tea. Giles Sleaford retires to the chimney-corner, grubling internally, as is his sullen wont, and looking darkly askance at the small intruder. He makes uneasy signs to his daughters to take her back whence she came, as he fills his after-supper pipe. Both his sons are already smoking, and the tobacco-laden atmosphere half chokes the child.

"Come, dear," says Lora, taking her by the hand.

"But what is she to have to eat?" queries Liz. "I suppose, Jud, *you* wouldn't go for the tea?"

"No. I wouldn't," answers Jud, promptly. "Im dead tired. I don't stir out of this corner, 'cept to go to bunk to-night. Besides she says she don't drink it—heerd her yourself, didn't yer?"

"Perhaps she'll take milk," suggests Dan. "Ask her, Lorry."

"Oh! yes, please, I will take milk," Olga responds, shrinking into herself; "anything. Indeed I am not in the least hungry."

"And I'll poach her an egg," says Liz, brightning, now that this difficult question of the commissariat is settled. "I'll fetch it in in five minutes. You undress her, Lora, and put her to bed."

"But I want to go home!" Olga says, beginning to tremble again. "I must not stay here all night. Papa and mamma do not know where I am. You must not undress me, please. I must go home."

"But, little missy, you can't go home to-night. See, it is eleven o'clock now, and even if Frank Livingston does come, which ain't likely (though what keeps him I can't think), it will be too late for you to go back to your home with him. It is a good three miles if it is an inch."

"Oh! what shall I do?" poor little Olga sobs, "and papa will be frightened to death, and mamma will worry herself sick. Oh! I wish Cousin Frank would come. But he will not—I know he will not. I made him promise this afternoon."

"What!" says Lora Sleaford, blankly.

"I made him promise. He stays out so late, you know, and I made him promise he would not any more. And that is why he has not come," explains Olga, with a sob.

"Well, I do declare!" cries Miss Sleaford, looking anything but pleased. "*You* made him promise! A bit of a dolly like you! Well—you see it's yourself you have punished after all. If you let him alone he would have been here two hours ago, and you might have been home by this."

Miss Ventnor covers her face with her mite of a pocket hand-

kerchief, and sobs within its folds. She is too much a little lady to do her weeping, or anything else, loudly or ungracefully, but none the less they are very real tears the cobweb cambric quenches.

"So you didn't want Mr. Frank to come here," goes on Lora, still sulkily; "how do you know he came?"

"I did—didn't know. I only know—he stopped out late. And he said—said—it was up the village. And I made him prom—promise he wouldn't do so any more. Oh, dear, dear, dear!"

"There, there, stop crying," says Lora, relenting; "you'll certainly make yourself sick. Here's Liz with something to eat. It ain't what you're used to, I dare say, but you must take something, you know, or you won't be able to go home to-morrow either."

This argument effectually rouses the child. She dries her tears, and remembers suddenly she *is* hungry. Liz comes forward with a big black tray, which is found to contain a glass of milk, a poached egg, some raspberries, a bit of butter, and a triangular wedge of short-cake.

"Now," she says, "that's the best we can do for you. So eat something and go to bed."

She places the tray before the child, and Lora draws her to a window, where a whispered conference takes place.

"Well, I never!" says Miss Sleaford, the second, in a high dudgeon; "the idea! Gracious me! a chit like that too!"

It is evident Lora is retailing the embargo laid on Master Frank's visits.

"It is lucky she doesn't know about the presents, the jewelry and things. What an old-fashioned little puss."

CHAPTER XIV.

A DEED OF DARKNESS.

There is more whispering, some giggling, and Olga feels in every shrinking little nerve that it is all about her. She drinks the milk, and eats the fruit, essays the egg, and mingles her tears with her meat. Oh, how alarmed papa and mamma will be, and what a dreadful place this is to spend a whole long night. Will they leave her alone in this room? Will they leave her in the dark——

"Now, then!" exclaims Liz, briskly, "I see you've done, so I'll just take the things, and go to bed. Father and the boys have gone already, and I'm as blinky as an owl. Lora——"

"I'll stay for a bit," says Lora. She is not an ill-natured girl, and she sees the speechless terror in the child's eyes. "You go to bed. I can sleep it out to-morrow morning."

Liz goes without more ado. Lora sits down beside the little girl, and begins to unbutton her boots.

"You know you can't go home to-night," she says, soothingly, "and you are sleepy and nearly tired to death. Now you must just let me fix you up a bed here on the lounge, and I'll only take off your dress, because you've no night-gown to put

on. I'll stay here with you, and to-morrow the first thing my brother Judson will go over to your cottage and tell your folks. Now be good; don't look so pale and scary; there's nothing to be afraid of here, and I'm going to stay with you all night."

"All night?" questions Olga, lifting two large, earnest eyes.

"Oh, yes, all night," says Lora, who differs from George Washington, and *can* tell a lie. "Now I'll fix your bed, and sing you to sleep, and you will be at home to-morrow morning before you know it."

She produces sheets and a quilt, and improvises a bed, lays Olga in it, and takes a seat by her side.

"I will sing for you," she says. "You shut those pretty blue peepers right away, and don't open them till breakfast time to-morrow."

She begins in a sweet, crooning voice a camp-meeting hymn. The low singing sound soothes the child's still quivering nerves. Gradually her eyelids sway heavily, close, open again, shut once more, and she is fast. Then Miss Sleaford rises with a great yawn.

"Off at last, and a tough job it was. Hush! twelve o'clock! I thought it was twenty I wonder if that young limb, Joanna, is back? Most likely not, though. It's queer she don't take her death o' fever 'n ague, sleeping outdoors."

She gives a last look at the sleeper.

"Fast as a church," she whispers.

She takes the lamp, leaves the room, shuts the door softly, and goes up stairs under the rafters to join her sleeping sister.

The old red farm-house is very still. In the kitchen black beetles hold high carnival; in the parlor the moonlight streams in on the pale hair and quiet face of the little lost heiress. Outside the trees sway and rustle in the night breeze, and the stars burn big and bright in the mysterious silence of early morning.

One! two! three!

With a start Olga Ventnor awakes. It is the wooden Connecticut clock in the kitchen loudly proclaiming the hour. Awakes with a chill and a thrill of terror, to find herself quite alone, Lora gone, the light fled, the pale, solemn shine of the moon filling the place, and that loud strident clock striking three.

Oh, to hear Cousin Frank's footsteps *now* stealing up and on to his room! Oh, for Jeannette—Lora—any one—anything but this silent, spectral, moonlit room!

Stay! What is that?

She is *not* alone. Yonder in the corner, under the chimney-piece, crouches a figure all huddled in a heap, knees drawn up, and arms clasped around them. With appalling distinctness she sees it, the shock head of hair, the thin, fierce face, the bare feet and legs. She has seen it before. The moonlight is full upon it, the eyes are wide open and gleam like a cat's. The creature sits perfectly motionless, and stares before her. Perfectly motionless, also, Olga lies, in a trance of terror, scarcely breathing, feeling numb and frozen with deadly fear.

The thing stirs at last, shakes itself, turns to the bed, glares at it, and rises slowly to its feet. Olga's heart has stopped beat-

ing, she has no voice to cry out, all her faculties are absorbed in one——seeing. The apparition speaks in a muffled whisper to itself:

"I'll do it, I'll do it if they kill me—if they whip me till I'm dead! I hate her; I always hated her. I hate 'em all, but her most. I never thought I'd have the chance, and now she's here and asleep, and I'll do it, I'll do it, I'll do it!"

She tiptoes to the bed, there is a gleam of blue steel. Is it a knife? She is close—she stretches out one long, thin hand, clutches a handful of fair floating hair. The malignant face, the gleaming eyes, the wild hair, are within three inches of Olga. Then, with a shock, the child leaps from the bed, rushes frantically across the room, her skrieks rending the stillness, flings open the door, and falls headlong in the passage.

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HUGH LEE;

THE HAWKS OF THE SOUND.

A Tale of Long Island, the Sound, and the Sea.

BY CAPTAIN HARRY POMEROY,

Author of "THE WITCH OF THE WAVE," "CORSAIR AND PRIVATEER," "RIVAL BROTHERS," etc.

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HUGH LEE.

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HUGH LEE.

CHAPTER I.

THE WHALE-BOAT PRIVATEERSMEN.

During the war of the Revolution the numerous bays and coves that indent the Long Island shore of the Sound witnessed a species of warfare which, if less grand and imposing than naval combats of later days, was yet bloody and barbarous to a degree, and just as persistently and energetically prosecuted.

The men who waged this peculiar warfare were known as the "whale-boat privateersmen," and were a daring, reckless lot, recruited from the ranks of Long Island's Whigs and Tories, respectively, the members of either fleet being pronounced pirates by the other.

Under cover of night, for the most part—although a daylight expedition was by no means an unheard-of thing—these daring whale-boat privateersmen, their boats manned with from six to twelve men, the larger boats carrying swivel guns, in addition to the usual armament of muskets muskets, axes, pikes, lanterns, pursued their predatory course, sweeping out, with muffled

oars from some bay or inlet, in quest of lagging or anchored coasters, which were certain to be pillaged if overhauled, and perhaps fired.

These "Hawks of the Sound," as navigators called them, in their reckless daring, boarded, during the eventful years of the Revolution, more than one British corvette, when the watch was asleep and the officers making merry over their cards and wine, and succeeded in getting away unscathed, with more or less valuable booty.

Not infrequently would a Patriot and Tory crew meet upon the waters of the Sound, or in some bay, when, unless one crew greatly outnumbered the other, a fierce and sanguinary encounter was sure to follow, no quarter being shown, none asked, it being war to the knife, and the knife to the hilt.

These predatory patriots did not, however, by any means confine their depredations to the waters of the Sound. There were profit and danger on shore as well as on the Sound; and there they not infrequently sought the one in face of the other, no matter how great it appeared, scorning all peril if the booty warranted the risk to be run.

Says a writer (C. H. F.) concerning these Patriot and Tory marauders, and of the dark days in which they flourished:

"They would glide up to the beach with muffled oars, and after whispered commands, file off in squads through the woods toward some isolated farm-house or country-store, a patrol sometimes to be avoided along the shore, or an armed guard at some important house. They often went to capture a prominent cit-

izen, Patriot or Tory, as the case might be, for the sake of ransom, or for making him an exchange for some prisoner of war in the opposite lines; and often, too, purely for the sake of robbery, even at the price of blood, would they make these captures."

Further, this writer says: "The custom of hiding money was so general that the marauders in pursuit of plunder always threatened the lives of their victims or tortured them, even in some instances to death, to compel them to reveal their riches. Thus the lives and property of the inhabitants of those bays and necks along the north side of the island were in constant danger from both Whig and Tory bands bent on warlike captures, and from disguised men in pursuit of plunder."

Such was the state of affairs—a state of terror and distress hard to realize to-day—on the northern shore of Long Island at the time when our story opens

CHAPTER II.

PERSONAGES OF OUR STORY.

At the time of which we write there resided in and about North Hempstead three families, named, respectively, Lee, Joy, and Whyte, certain members of each of which will play prominent parts in our story.

Captain John Lee, familiarly and widely known as "Captain Jack," who had retired from the sea, owing to partial blindness, resided, with his family, consisting of wife, a son, and two daughters, on a farm beyond the eastern boundary of Hempstead toward Oyster Bay.

Captain Jack was a Whig to the backbone, a most pronounced and uncompromising Patriot, and all the members of his family were as true to the principles that animated the Patriots at large as the husband and father, though less demonstrative and aggressive.

Between the Lee farm and the boundary-line of Hempstead lay the farm of Mr. Samuel Joy, a widower, with son and daughter, the former a young man of twenty, named Gilbert, the latter a charming maid of eighteen, named Constance.

As far as his political status was concerned, Farmer Joy was "on the fence," with a strong leaning toward the Tories. Gil

Joy, as his son was always called, was a wavering sort of fellow, neither Patriot nor Tory, but friendly, apparently, to the noble cause, for reasons to be given shortly.

Constance, his sister, however, unlike her father and brother, was neither a neutral nor a waverer, but a decided Patriot, true as steel to the cause.

The third family was that of Mr. Walter Whyte, an out and out Tory, doing business in Hempstead, then occupied by the British, who used the old Presbyterian church as barracks, guard-house, and prison; and this man had one son, Walter Jr., who was as bitter a Tory as was his father.

Now, to explain the situation, let us say that Hugh Lee, Captain Jack's son, a fine, open-faced, athletic young man of twenty-two, was in love with Constance Joy, as was also young Walt Whyte, about Hugh's age.

Gil Joy was in love with Hugh Lee's eldest sister, Lucy, a fair maid of seventeen summers, who returned his love. This fact may account for the lukewarm patriotism he displayed, when otherwise he would have leaned, as did his father, to the Tory side, or gone over to it body and soul through the influence of Walt Whyte.

While Gil Joy's love for Lucy Lee made but an insincere Patriot of him—a lukewarm supporter of the grandest cause ever fought to successful issue—that of Constance Joy for Hugh Lee made the stanchest Patriot of her, the most defiant little female rebel in the land; and that she was a rebel, she gloried in boasting.

"Now, Farmer Joy did not sanction either the suit of Hugh Lee for the hand of his daughter, or that of his son for the hand of Captain Jack's daughter; favoring, in the first instance, the suit of "Walt" Whyte, and in the second preferring a daughter-in-law from a family on the winning side, which, he had reasoned himself into the firm belief, would be the royalist or Tory side.

"They'll hang that Cap'n Jack an' that air young rebel, Hugh, higher'n Haman some day!" he many a time had said to his son and daughter; "an' 'twould be a purty thing for you Stancy, to be the widder of a gallowed rebel, wouldn't it? An' you, too, Gil, to have for a wife the sister of a gallowed rebel!"

To these rather gloomy predictions, Gil never made any reply; not so Constance, however, who would answer with spirit, yet with respect, treating the prognostications with all the scorn of utter belief.

"Father, they'll *never hang* Captain Jack or Hugh Lee—*never!* King George's Hessians will be driven out of the land, and there'll be no hanging of Patriots. I am afraid some Tories will be hanged, though. I hope not, but they are wicked, many of them. Never fear that I shall be the widow of a gallowed rebel, father—I never shall be, for *they dare not hang a Patriot!*"

"Humph!" and the father would turn away, muttering: "You shall never be the *wife* of a rebel, if I kin help it. I don't want no gallows bird for a son-in-law."

Such was the situation in the Joy household. In that of Captain Jack it stood thus:

The old captain was not altogether pleased that his son, Hugh, whom he regarded as the apple of his eye, should have lost his heart in a Tory family, and did not hesitate to tell him so.

"Find a truer Patriot in all the land, father, and I will give her up," Hugh would say, when, sometimes, the old captain, incensed at Farmer Joy's Toryism, let out his thoughts in respect to the taint in the family of his son's sweetheart; and this challenge of Hugh's would invariably silence the old Patriot.

But Lucy, his daughter, did not come off so easily. She had lost her heart in the same objectionable family, but not to a member, as in his case, whose patriotism was unimpeachable; on the contrary, to one whose equivocal attitude in the pending struggle, and whose half-hearted allegiance to the Patriot cause, were severely execrated by the old captain who thoroughly understood the cause of the young fellow's assumed adherence to the cause of liberty—that he might further his suit with Lucy Lee.

"The mongrel! Blast his eyes!" he would exclaim in presence of his daughter. "He ain't got the manliness to take his stand with us, sink or swim; nor ain't got the courage to side with the Tories, out an' out! He's neither fish nor flesh, this Gil Joy ain't, an' the mongrel shall never cross blood with the Lees, if I can prevent it. Better an out-and-out Tory than sech

a pus'laminous Patriot! Don't count on *him* for a mate, Lucy, if you do you count on nothin'."

"But, dear father!" Lucy would beseechingly exclaim.

"Don't talk, Lucy, don't talk! You can't make a Patriot out o' him no more'n ye ken make a silk pu's' of a sow's ear, or a sheet anchor of a belayin-pin."

And Lucy would retire in silence and sadness, while the old captain would rattle away with scorn and madness at an imaginary Gil Joy.

CHAPTER III.

THE WATER WAGTAILS.

Hugh Lee, our hero, was a whale-boat privateersman, the commander of a twelve-oared craft carrying a swivel-gun. With one exception, the crew of the Water Wagtail, as the boat was called, were sterling patriots, young fellows whose fidelity to their country's cause was unquestionable, the exception noted being Gil Joy.

The "Water Wagtails," as Hugh Lee's crew had been dubbed by the Tories of the Sound fleet, although as resolute and recklessly daring as any of the whale-boat men, were not so courageous in their depredations, and abstained from many questionable acts which the others did not hesitate to commit. They discriminated between their friends and foes, and it was on account of their not sharing in the general greed for plunder, no matter from whom obtained, that the appellation of "Water Wagtails" had been derisively given them as implying harmlessness of character, and even a taint of cowardice.

To show his indifference in the matter, and his contempt of those who had applied to his crew and himself the appellation, Hugh Lee at once changed the name of his boat from Water

Witch to "Water Wagtails," and on three or four occasions, on the inshore waters of the Sound, he had fought his craft against those of his deriders, convincing them that brave hearts could fight as well under a derisive name as under the most heroic.

* * * * * * * *

A little to the west of Oyster Bay there was, at that time, a small, bottle-shaped inlet, long since worn away, through whose narrow neck poured in and out the waters of the Sound.

Near the lower end, on the right of this haven, in a partially artificial recess dug in the bluff, the existence of which would never have been suspected, nature and art effectually concealing the opening, lay the Water Wagtail, there always being a sufficiency of water to float her.

The inner end of this recess or chamber, which had been excavated by the Water Wagtails, opened out into a ravine, thus securing entrance and exit by land as well as by water, and as effectually concealed.

The chamber by the bluff was occupied one evening in the month of June, just one hundred years ago, by a party of nine men ranging from twenty to thirty-five years of age, whose costume, if not as picturesque as those of the Continental brigands of the present day, were at least as striking and varied, if not grotesque in some instances. They were dressed in clothes of the commonest description—patched, ragged, and soiled, and of every conceivable cut, color, and material, held together with buttons of brass, bone, iron, and wood; and yet these men, seated on the ground or on rough boxes, had nothing of the

look of vagabonds about them, but rather that of men who had high aims and purposes to accomplish, for which they were prepared to suffer and to risk everything.

These were the Water Wagtails, and they were evidently discussing some subject which was of general interest.

"I tell yer, boys," said one of the elder men, "I b'lieve he'll betray us. He's limber in the knees on this side o' the line, an' too stiff on the other side with that Hessian whelp, Walt Whyte."

"I ain't afeared on't, Sim," spoke up one a few years younger. "He's in love with Lu Lee, an' that'll prevent him. I hain't got no great b'lief in his stickin' to our side, on'y fur that; but that'll hold him."

"If he had any chance o' gittin' her, it mout, Jake," the first speaker rejoined; "but he hain't, not a bit—not w'ile old Cap'n Jack's alive. He knows he's a snake in the grass, an' hates him wuss'n pizen. I b'lieve he'd marry the gal to Walt Whyte, or any other straight-out Tory, afore he would to Gil Joy, who mout as well be in love with Lord Howe's gal, if he's got one, as Cap'n Jack's, fur all the good it'll do him."

"As we've been talkin' this thing over among us," spoke up a third, "s'posin' we speak to Cap'n Hugh about it some time. Can't do it to-night, as Gil will come along with him prob'bly.'

"Jest what I mean to do," said the first speaker, Sim.

"Might as well," said a fourth, "cos thar ain't no use, an' a good deal o' danger, in havin' a feller here that ain't true-blue."

"An' he's a Jonah, I'll bet," interposed Sim.

"Don't you mean a Judas?" suggested the previous speaker.

"Yes, that's the bird, and so much the wuss," said Sim; "fur we could chuck Jonah overboard an' be safe; but if we git red of Judas, he'll surely show 'em our hiding-place."

"I don't b'lieve that would hurt his feelin's," said another of the crew. "He hain't got no stomach for the work, an' 'd rather be chucked out as not, I guess. Cap'n Hugh put him in, an' he's ashamed to sneak out."

"That's jes' so, Matt," broke in another; "jest exzackly, in my 'pinion. Chuck him outer the crew for a Jonah, an' he'll be glad on't, an' we'll be safe. Elsewise, to git out, he'll turn Judas, you see if he don't. Hello! here's Cap'n Hugh—alone."

Hugh Lee, in a faded blue flannel shirt, cloth cap, patched drab trousers, and cowhide boots, stepped into the chamber amid the conclave, from the ravine passage, and his open, manly face was good to look upon as it caught the red glare of the flaming torches."

"All here? No," were his first words, as he looked them over quickly. "Where's the Swains—Zeb and Mark?"

"Some o' their folks dead over to Cow Neck, Cap'n Hugh," responded Sim, whose surname was Wales. "Where's Gil Joy, cap'n?' he queried, an instant later, his tone a significant one to his fellows.

"Gil?—oh, he'll be here. I thought he might get here before me. Time enough, though, between now and shut-down darkness, for there's not a breath of wind astir, and won't be

afore sunrise. The schooner won't much more'n fetch abreast of the 'Bottle'"—"Bottle Bay" their retreat had been named, but they spoke of it as the "Bottle" for short—"afore eleven, let them tow their smartest. We'll capture her long afore daylight, and that Newport Tory, Skipper Snow, 'll wish he hadn't supplied these British cruisers for cursed British gold—the Hessian!"

Hugh Lee sat down on a box resigned to him by one of his crew, and lighted a pipe, a silence that was almost oppressive settling upon the motley group, the flare of the flaming torches throwing grotesque, dancing shadows about the floor and sides of the cavern, presenting to the eye a weird, fantastic scene.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OATH OF HUGH LEE.

Sim Wales, the second in command of the Water Wagtail, was the first to break the silence that had become irksome.

"Cap'n Hugh," said he, knocking the ashes from his black clay pipe, "there's ben some talk among us—I mout's well say as how, p'r'aps, I've done as much on't as any one—some talk consarnin' Gil Joy."

He spoke slowly, and paused to take breath and consider his next words, Hugh Lee looking at him with a puzzled expression of countenance.

"Gil Joy—talking about him? What of *him*, Sim?" Hugh said, in a moment, the other remaining silent.

"Wal, Cap'n Hugh, thar's no use'n bein' mealy-mouthed in times like these with anybody, an' you know that as well as I do."

Hugh looked more puzzled and curious than ever, but said nothing.

"Some on us—the most on us, I guess, Cap'n Hugh—hain't got no very great opinion o' Gil Joy. We don't think he would risk much on our side, to say the least. To say more, we don't

think he'd lay still an' have his leg sawed off, afore he'd let Walt Whyte an' his Tory crew o' cut-throats into the Bottle, an' into this ere back parlor. That's what most on us think, Cap'n Hugh; an' on'y that he's sparkin' your sister, you'd a hearn of it afore. That made us kind o' bashful 'bout sayin' anything to you 'bout it, you see—sorry, now, Cap'n Hugh; but it hed better be out'n in, you know."

"You're right, Sim, right," Hugh Lee promptly spoke up. "It's better out than in, as you say. I wish you'd spoken afore about this."

Sim and several of the others looked relieved at the words of their captain, who showed that he had not been angered at what his first mate had said.

"It's always best," Hugh Lee went on to say, "to speak your mind right out, an' not brood over what's in it, which always makes this worse. Now, as to Gil, I know he's a faint heart in our cause, but I can't think he'd prove a false heart. He's weak in his principles, but not a bad fellow at heart."

"When a feller's weak in his principles in sech times as these," broke in Sim Wales, "the devil will get him onto the wrong side in time, sure. A weak chap's a dangerous one."

"There's a good deal of truth in that, Sim," rejoined Hugh Lee. "But you see how Gil is situated. I don't know what he'll *gain* by turning traitor, but I *do* know what he'll *lose*—one o' the finest girls in the land, if I say it that shouldn't."

"That's what I said," broke in Jake Long; "she'll hold him—your sister will."

"I think so, myself, boys," said Hugh; "but a fig for such fidelity as that—the fidelity that hinges on the gain or loss of something outside of the cause. You suspect him—you're afraid of him—that's enough. Out he goes from among us, unless he'll take an oath such as I'll talk off to him—such as each one of us will take—the strongest and most binding oath I can invent. Unless he takes that oath to be true to the cause of liberty, true to us, out he goes. If he takes the oath, I'll take the risk of his betraying us—will you?"—this to his crew collectively.

"I will, fur one," promptly responded Sim Wales, the others severally, and in like manner, responding.

"The thing is settled then, till he comes," said Hugh; adding, "Act just the same's usual when he comes, boys. Don't let him see that—here he comes, now."

A moment, and a young fellow of twenty, tolerably well arrayed, and quite good looking, his face showing the irresolution of a weak nature, more amiability than shrewdness, emerged from the ravine passage into the chamber.

The new comer was Gil Joy, who was greeted as usual, and who soon found a seat.

A few moments of desultory conversation, and Hugh Lee came to his feet.

"Boys—friends and brothers," he said, "I'm going to take an oath, such a one as no true Patriot would hesitate to take, I know."

Straightening himself up, he raised high his right hand, his

left pressed upon his heart, and after a moment's pause, proceeded to the utterance of the words of a most binding oath, which was too extended, and perhaps too startling, for presentation in these columns, his manner and tones, the place and its surroundings, the weird, red light of the flaring torches, all lending weight to the impressive solemnity of his utterances.

But the climax was reached when, surrounded by his comrades, who had risen, he threw both hands aloft, and invoked the vengeance of Heaven upon himself if he failed to fulfill his oath, his tall, sinewy form, straight as an arrow, showing finely in the red glare, seeming, under the spell of the occasion, the form of a demi-god—the genius of imprecation!

CHAPTER V.

THE OATH REJECTED BY GIL JOY.

The profound silence which succeeded Hugh Lee's impressive oath was broken at length by Sim Wales.

"By the god o' batttes, Cap'n Hugh, but that was a mighty bouncin' oath! But I, Sim Wales, ken take that oath—amen!"

"And I!" "And I!" the others, with one exception, singly responded.

"Swear us, Cap'n Hugh," the enthusiastic Sim exclaimed, "swear us now. Say the words slow an' few 't a time, so's we ken all speak 'em, and not miss any on 'em."

He and eight of his fellows ranged themselves in a row, the ninth standing aloof, with a face that paled even under the torch's red glare, and limbs that trembled as he stood.

"Gracious!" he exclaimed, "I can't!"

"Can't what?" Hugh Lee demanded, almost fiercely, in accents thunder-toned and startling, betraying his surprise and anger.

The heart of poor, irresolute Gil Joy shrunk in his breast.

"Can't what?" again demanded Hugh Lee.

"Can't do that; can't———"

"Can't take that oath—is that it, Gil Joy?" said Hugh Lee, sharply. "Why not?"

"Because—there. Father says you'll all be hung. He says King George will keep his own and crush all the rebels in the land."

"Poor, pitiful boy!" contemptuously exclaimed Hugh Lee. Then, in tones and words heroic, thundered: "Tell your father—tell every Tory that you meet, King George will *lose* his own—the colonies! His lords, his Hessians, his minions, all will be thrown and trampled under Patriot feet, and the land will be *our* own, and our children's children's *own* for ages."

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" vociferated his comrades, the cheers being almost deafening.

Capt. Hugh now stepped up to Gil Joy, and said:

"You will take that part of the oath relating to this secret retreat—you will swear not to betray us here."

The young fellow did not respond.

"Kill him!" "Kill him!" "He's a traitor!" shouted several voices, and bright knives gleamed in the red glare of the torches, as the line of nine broke in confusion.

Like a lion, Hugh Lee turned upon his crew, crying:

"Who talks of killing here? Sheath those knives at once! You forget yourselves. *I* command here, *you* obey!"

Every knife was sheathed in an instant, and not a word was uttered.

Turning upon the spiritless young fellow again, Hugh Lee asked him if he had betrayed their hiding-place.

"No, I haven't," he promptly and with some vehemence responded, his tone and manner satisfying all that he spoke truly.

"Good for *you*, Gil Roy," said his questioner. "Now swear, by all your hopes of Heaven, that you never will. Repeat after me."

"I can't—I can't! They might make me!" uttered the craven.

"Ah, ha! they might *make* you, eh? Craven, with a mind of wax and heart of mud! *Make* you? *I swear they never shall!* Bind him, boys. Don't be brutes, now. He's dangerous at large, but we needn't kill him. Well caged, he will be just as harmless as dead."

Turning to his first mate, the genenous but prompt-acting and determined young captain of the privateersman said, coolly:

"See how the night is, Sim. We'll be off if everything serves."

Sim departed through the inner passage, while Gil Roy was being bound by his fellows—two or three of them.

The weak-hearted young fellow wept like a child as he was being fettered, but said nothing, except to sob out, now and then:

"Don't hurt me so—don't!"

"Lucy mate with such as he, a blubbering baby!" contemptuously muttered Hugh Lee. "Bah! never, if I can help it!"

And then he busied himself in preparation for the affair in hand—the expedition upon the Sound, under cover of darkness.

Sim soon reported favorably concerning the night, when Hugh said :

"Eight oars all to-night, Sim. You go aft, an' I'll for'ard. We've enough, I guess, ten of us."

"An' to spare, Cap'n Hugh, I'll warrant," replied Sim.

In ten minutes, during which time Hugh Lee administered the oath to the faithful nine, all was in readiness for the start.

"Don't leave me here alone, Hugh Lee!" cried the captive, piteously—"don't leave me! You may not come back alive."

"Some of us will," curtly responded Hugh.

"I'll take the oath—I'll swear!" screamed the other, in accents of abject fear.

"Not now," was Hugh's only response. "Come, boys, out with the Wagtail."

"If you should all be killed or drowned!" screamed the fear-stricken youth, imploringly, as the thought came in dreadful shape to his mind.

This elicited no response, and the miserable young fellow continued his cries till the Wagtail emerged from her retreat upon the waters of "Bottle Bay," when no further sounds were heard.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NOCTURNAL EXPEDITION.

Five minutes later, and eyes accustomed to darkness, had they been anywhere near the mouth of the "Bottle," might have seen creeping therefrom, in the black shadow of the high bluff, an indistinctly defined *something*—a huge centipede of the sea, one could imagine it, with its long, noiselessly-moving legs and smoothly-gliding body; or a monster squid or cuttle-fish—a horrible creature, with its several arms, its tentacula and ill-defined body, heading for the open Sound.

It was no such aquatic monster, however; it was the Water Wagtail—only that and nothing more.

Under the bluff was black as ink, and out of this intense darkness, into a lesser degree of blackness, silently and swiftly swept the whale-boat, her muffled oars pulled by sixteen sinewy arms, whose muscles were as hard as iron.

Hugh Lee sat in the bow with a marine night-glass, with which he swept the offing, but saw nothing to reward his search.

"Keep her off to the east," he said, in a voice just loud enough to be heard, "and we'll have the schooner in our teeth when we wear round. We're sure to head her off."

The boat sheered off to the eastward, and sped swiftly on for a few moments, when her captain, in a low tone, called out:

"Sheer up to the nor'ard. She's never made this easting."

A few minutes in this course, Hugh scanning the black void all around him, but in vain, and the whale-boat was headed west, skimming along at somewhat slackened speed, according to orders of its commander, who kept his night-glass constantly employed in his search into the darkness.

About four minutes on this westward course, and Hugh whispered:

"Easy, boys; I've made her out on the starboard bow, well away. It *must* be her, for there was nothing else out here at sundown, and couldn't have got here since. Larboard lay! We'll sweep under her counter. Sheer, now, to starboard; I can just make her out. Steady—now give way!"

Onward swept the whale-boat over the glass-like surface of the Sound, a few moments sufficing to bring her abreast of, and so close on the schooner, that the patter of the reef-points on the fore and main sails, as the latter feebly flapped from larboard to starboard, was heard by the expectant and ready ears of the crew of the Water Wagtail.

Suddenly a flash of real fire, emanating from the starboard side of the schooner's deck, amidship, illumined the darkness to the southward, the scope of its glare encompassing the whale-boat and her crew, and bringing into bold and ruddy relief against the northern background of blackness the sails, spars,

and rigging of the fore-and-after, the black waters under the unseen hull reflecting the upper works of the vessel in spectral luminosity.

"What boat's that?" was the instant hail, in sharp and long-drawn nasal tones, supplemented with the cautionary and threatening command: "Keep off er here, or we'll blow ye into kingdom-come in tew jiffys! Get eout, now, quick!"

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